

Shared Care Letter for Advanced Cancer

Patient



[DATE]

[PATIENT INFO]

Living well with Advanced Cancer

Being diagnosed with advanced cancer is life-changing and you are not alone. It can be hard to find what you need within the healthcare system. We are here for you. Reach out to find hope and support.

To help you live well with advanced cancer we encourage “shared care” which combines support from your cancer team and your family doctor or primary care team. Together, we can get you the support you need. This letter will help you get started.

What is “advanced cancer”?

When cancer is advanced, we focus on helping you live as well and as long as possible. Different doctors may use different words to describe when a cancer is advanced. Depending on your condition, you may hear words such as secondary, metastatic, progressive, incurable, non-curative or end-stage. When cancer is not likely to be cured, we will continue to give you medical care that will help you to live with hope and support your goals.

How do I get started?

Your family doctor will share in your care with you and your cancer team.

- We ask that you make an appointment with your family doctor within the next month**, even if you feel well. It is important to plan and put supports in place. Please take this letter with you. Your family doctor will also receive information and updates from the Cancer Centre.

If you do not have a family doctor, here is how to find a list of doctors accepting patients in your area:

- Call Health Link Alberta (811)
- Visit <https://www.ahs.ca> and search for “find a doctor”. This website will give you choices to help you find the family doctor who is right for you. If you need help navigating the site, have a friend or family member help you.

If you have a new doctor, be sure to tell them about your cancer diagnosis and treatment. If you still cannot find a family doctor, please discuss this with your cancer team.

What else can I do for myself?

As you think about your future, many feelings and concerns may come up. Everyone copes with their illness differently.

- Ask for Supportive and Palliative Care.** Supportive and palliative care aim to improve or maintain your quality of life while living with cancer.

Select what you need from many supportive services available through your Cancer Centre. They can help with nutrition, rehabilitation and exercise, financial and resource counselling. Supportive Care and Living Well: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/cancer/Page16325.aspx>

Individual counselling or support groups can be helpful with things such as communication, stress management, coping with treatment side effects, mood changes, quality of life, body image, sexual health and loneliness. Select the closest resource to you and call to make an appointment:

Calgary: 587-231-3570	Edmonton: 780-643-4303	Grande Prairie: 825-412-4200
Lethbridge: 403-388-6814	Medicine Hat: 403-529-8817	Red Deer: 403-343-4485
Other Communities visit www.ahs.ca/cpn and click: Provincial Cancer Patient Navigation		

Sexual Health: Cancer treatment can have a huge impact on sexual function and health. Help is available, visit myhealth.alberta.ca/cancer-and-sexuality/introduction

Other sources of supportive care:

- **Wellspring:** <https://wellspringalberta.ca/>; 1-866-682-3135 (Toll free)
Find emotional, social, spiritual, and informational support for you and your loved ones at Wellspring Alberta.
- **Canadian Cancer Society Advanced Cancer booklet** (practical information and support for you and those close to you) cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/resources/publications/advanced-cancer

Palliative care aims to improve or maintain your quality of life while living with cancer. Palliative care is sometimes misunderstood. It does not mean you have to stop cancer treatment to receive it, and it is not just for end of life. Palliative care:

- is an added layer of support for you and your family
- is treatment that provides relief from the symptoms and stress of living with advanced cancer and helps you get on with life
- helps you explore how your illness may progress and supports you in making healthcare decisions
- is provided along with treatment for the cancer, or by itself.

More information about palliative care in Alberta:

- **Palliative care services:** www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page14778.aspx
- **Compassionate Alberta:** compassionatealberta.ca

Who will help me manage my illness?

Most people with advanced cancer have symptoms, concerns and questions.

Your care **team** may include a variety of health care providers. For example, nurses, doctors, pharmacists, social workers, dietitians, therapists, and psychologists. They can help:

- Manage symptoms from your cancer or treatment, (such as pain, stress, constipation, or sleep problems)
- Guide Advance Care Planning
- Support you and your family
- Address Legal/Financial/Social Concerns
- Access Community Resources

Make sure to ask how you can best manage each issue you have.

Your Oncologist	Your Family Doctor
<p>Manages your cancer treatment plan, investigations and cancer-related concerns. May provide palliative chemotherapy or radiation to help slow cancer growth or provide symptom relief.</p>	<p>Manages non-cancer related concerns. May coordinate medical, emotional and practical supports in the community for you and your family.</p> <p>Refills of your medications not related to cancer treatment (such as high blood pressure or diabetes)</p>
Your Specialist Palliative Care Team (such as palliative nurse or doctor consultants and palliative home care)	
<p>May provide additional symptom relief and practical supports. They may see you at the cancer centre or in your home.</p> <p>Many people want to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. Palliative home care offers professional and personal healthcare services to patients and families who are living with advanced cancer. In towns or rural areas that do not have dedicated palliative home care, integrated home care provides these services with the support of palliative care consultants.</p>	

Ask your health care providers for help and seek the information you need. Keeping track of your questions between visits may help you remember what you want to ask.

Ask who to call for questions, including during evenings and weekends. Make a plan for urgent situations.

How can I communicate my plans?

- Revisit or start thinking and talking about your future care and treatment. This will help your family and your health care teams understand your goals and priorities. This is called **Advance Care Planning**.

Steps of Advance Care Planning are:

- Think about what is important to you
- Learn about your current and future health care decisions
- Choose someone you trust to respect your wishes and make medical decisions on your behalf should you lose that ability
- Talk about your goals of care with those close to you and your care teams
- Document your plans in a **Personal Directive**
- Revisit this whenever your goals or wishes change

Your doctor can order a **Goals of Care Designation** that fits with your medical condition and helps communicate your goals and values to your health care providers. Visit www.conversationsmatter.ca for tips and ideas on how to start or continue planning.

Keep your Goals of Care Designation and other advance care planning documents in the “green sleeve.” This green plastic folder helps your health care providers know your wishes in an emergency. Store the green sleeve on or near your fridge and bring it to your appointments.

Advance Care Planning documents include:

- Personal Directive** is a legal document to name person or people you have picked to make health and personal decisions for you if you become unable to do so.
- Enduring Power of Attorney** is a legal document to name someone you trust to make financial decisions for you.
- A **Will** is a legal document that outlines how you would like your property and possessions distributed and to name a guardian for children.

We are here to support you!

[PRESCRIBER] and Your Oncology Team